Motivation and personality: Handbook of thematic content analysis

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CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Published by the Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge
The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge CB2 1RP
40 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011, USA
10 Stamford Road, Oakleigh, Victoria 3166, Australia

First published 1992

Printed in the United States of America

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Motivation and personality : handbook of thematic content analysis / Charles P. Smith, editor ; in association with John W. Atkinson, David C. McClelland, Joseph Veroff.
p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references and indexes.
ISBN 0-521-40052-X
1. Motivation (Psychology) – Testing. 2. Personality and motivation. I. Smith, Charles P., 1931– .
BF503.M665 1992
153.8'014-dc20 91-23786

A catalog record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN 0-521-40052-X hardback

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CHARLES P. SMITH

OVERVIEW

This handbook deals with the use of content analysis for making inferences about the characteristics or experiences of persons or social groups. In this chapter the ancestry, conception, and gestation of this volume are briefly described. The particular approach to content analysis of the contributors is characterized; highlights are reviewed; integrative themes are identified; a trend away from single-variable research is documented; and some not-so-obvious implications of the contents for the debate about the cross-situational consistency of behavior are noted.

Conception

The initial impetus for the book was provided by requests to the contributors for copies of their scoring systems and practice materials. Soon the plan expanded to include information about current research, and a section on theoretical and methodological issues. Part I deals with the determinants of thematic apperception, reliability and validity, the relation of thematic analysis to other contemporary methods of conceptualizing and measuring person variables, and the use of thematic methods in survey research and for the analysis of archival and naturally occurring verbal materials. Part II presents fourteen different scoring systems for the assessment of motives, attributional and cognitive orientations, and psychosocial orientations. With one exception, these systems are applicable to verbal material from both sexes. Each system is introduced by a concise chapter describing the development of the system and key studies. (Because of their brevity, some of these prefatory chapters may require some background knowledge to be fully appreciated.) Part III provides guidelines for research, and materials for scorer training and data collection.

I wish to thank David McClelland, Ian McMahan, and Peter Suedfeld for their helpful comments on an earlier draft of this chapter.

Table 1.1. *Topics investigated by means of various scoring systems (chapter numbers in parentheses)*

Academic achievement
Classroom climate (23)
Determinants of grades (9, 13, 23)
Graduation rates (23)
Volunteering in class (19)

Avoidance motivation
Fear of failure (2, 9)
Fear of rejection (13)
Fear of success (11)
Fear of weakness (19)
Avoidance of uncertainty (29)

Careers
Leader careers (27)
Managerial success (5, 35)
Occupational mobility (6, 9)
Women's careers (33)

Inner life (private personality)
Affiliative thoughts (15)
Daily affect (4)
Experience sampling (4, 15)
Feelings of autonomy, self-determination (23, 31, 33)
Mood shifts (25)
Secrets and fears (33)
Well-being versus distress (4, 15, 31)

Personality development and change
Age and conceptual complexity (27)
Change in psychotherapy (25)
Child-rearing practices (9, 17)
Motive development (3, 21)
Origin training (23)
Parent–child interaction (19, 23)
Parental expectations (35)

Personality and social processes
Attitude change (27)
Groupthink (21, 27)
Interpersonal attraction (27)
Leadership (19, 27, 35)
Political activity (19, 25)

Stress and coping
Adaptation to life changes (31)
Coping capacity (33)
Distress in cancer patients (33)
Helplessness (25)
Responses to stress (27, 31, 33)

Gender differences
Fear of success (11)
Intimacy (15)
Personal causation (23)
Responsibility (35)

Goal setting
Occupational choice (9)
Personal goals (4)
Realism of goal setting (5, 9, 29)
Short-term and long-term goals (9)

Methodology and measurement
Archival analysis (7, 9, 21, 27)
Computer simulation (2)
Controlling for verbal fluency (11, 19, 21, 27, 37)
Relation of self-report and content analysis measures (3, 4, 11, 23, 25)
Reliability and validity of thematic measures (2, 8, 9, 21, et al.)
Sampling verbal material (7, 27, 37)
Storytelling instructions (9, 19, 21, 37)
Storytelling stimuli (pictures, verbal cues) (6, 21, 23, 37)
Use of thematic measures in survey research (6)

Physical health and illness
Agency and illness (5)
Death from heart disease (7)
Elevated blood pressure (5, 33)
Immune system functioning (5, 17, 21)
Pessimistic style and illness (25)
Release of catecholamines (5)
Severity of illness (5, 25)

Table 1.1. *Continued*

Societal characteristics and trends; ideology	*Psychosocial adjustment*
Child-rearing practices in different societies (9)	Alcohol and/or drug abuse (4, 15, 35)
Economic development of nations (7, 9)	Career, family role adaptation (35)
Entrepreneurial activity in different cultures (9)	Concern about sexual identity (19)
Homicide rates (19)	Divorce (21, 31)
Modal personality (7)	Expression of aggression (21, 35)
Periods of war and peace (7)	Job satisfaction (6, 15)
Political ideology (27)	Marital happiness (5, 6, 15, 19)
Roles of marriage, parenthood, and work (6)	Major life changes (31)
The Protestant ethic (6, 9)	Medical school adjustment (5)
Treatment of events by mass media (7)	Uncontrollable events (25)
	Studies of important persons
	Novelists, scientists, revolutionaries (27)
	Political leaders (7, 27)
	Supreme court justices (7, 27)

Scope and provenance

The scope of the book is conveyed by the range of scoring systems and the topics investigated by means of these systems. The achievement, affiliation, and power motive systems are included in essentially their original form. Other previously published systems are included in *revised* form, including those for personal causation, explanatory style, intimacy motivation, motivation to avoid success, and (an alternative approach to) power motivation. Research employing the remaining systems has been published, but the following coding systems themselves have not been published previously: affiliative trust–mistrust, conceptual/integrative complexity, uncertainty orientation, and systems for assessing three psychosocial orientations: stances toward the environment, self-definition and social definition, and responsibility.

The theoretical provenance of these systems is equally broad; they reflect the influence of Murray (achievement, affiliation, power), Adler (power as fear of weakness), Erikson (stances toward the environment; affiliative trust–mistrust), Kelly and Schroder (conceptual/integrative complexity), Heider (explanatory style), Buber, Sullivan, Maslow, and Bakan (intimacy), White, Heider, and Kelley (personal causation and the origin concept), Rokeach, Raynor, and Trope (uncertainty orientation), Sartre and de Beauvoir (self-definition).

Readers familiar with some of the original scoring systems may be surprised by the amount of recent research that has been carried out on topics of contemporary interest. Some categories into which these topics fall are listed in Table 1.1.

Extensive as it is, however, this book does not attempt to include clinically oriented systems of content analysis such as those of Karon (1981)

or Westen (1991), nor does it present the work of researchers such as Martindale (1990) and Simonton (1987, 1990) whose content analytic studies are not oriented toward the use of previously validated individual difference measures of particular person variables.

The synergistic effect of bringing the contributions together

When all of the chapters were in place it became clear that the separate contributions taken together complemented each other and contributed to a general understanding of both the thematic method and current issues in theory and research in the behavioral and social sciences. In part these emergent qualities arise because motive measures are juxtaposed with measures of styles and what we have called *orientations*. Together these measures yield a more balanced and integrated approach to personality structure and process. In addition to being of importance in their own right, some of the nonmotive measures are moderators of motive expression and others complement motive measures in providing insights into phenomena of general interest, such as political leadership. In contrast to the hundreds of isolated studies that have employed thematic apperceptive measures with little cumulative impact, the contributions included here add up to a relatively coherent body of knowledge concerning a wide variety of personal and social phenomena.

THE PRESENT APPROACH TO THEMATIC CONTENT ANALYSIS

Key terms and concepts

Of the many possible applications of content analysis, the one represented by the systems in this volume involves "coding" or "scoring" verbal material for *content* or *style* for the purpose of making inferences about, or assessing, the characteristics or experiences of persons, social groups, or historical periods. The term *thematic* is used loosely in the title to signify this particular use of content analysis. *Thematic* connotes the analysis of storylike verbal material, and the use of relatively comprehensive units of analysis such as *themas* (Murray, 1943), *themes* (Holsti, 1969), or combinations of categories (Aron, 1950). While many of the systems included here reflect the Murray tradition, others do not and are not thematic in the sense just described. For example, some assess style rather than content, and some do not employ storylike material.

For the most part, throughout this book, terms such as *thematic apperceptive measure* or *picture-story exercise* have been used rather than *Thematic Apperception Test* or *TAT* in order to distinguish the modified procedures that have been developed from Murray's (1943) published test. Some of Murray's terms are used, however. For example, most readers will recognize the lowercase italicized *n* as Murray's abbreviation for "need."

The terms *projective* and *fantasy* usually associated with thematic apperception, receive relatively little use in this volume. Suffice it to say that these terms have excess clinical and theoretical connotations that are not a necessary part of most of the approaches included here (cf. D. G. Winter, 1973, p. 35). As deCharms (chapter 23) puts it: "Although the thought sampling technique has roots in the concepts of the unconscious and projection, we avoid these terms in favor of construing the thought sample as a nonself-conscious description of the way a person experiences her world."

It is probably safe to say that most of the contributors think of their work as involving some sort of "thought sampling," to use Murray's (1943) felicitous term, and that they select verbal material to be representative of a person's characteristic thought content or style (under the particular conditions in which the verbal material is produced). Even when the verbal material takes the form of imaginative stories, however, most authors have not used the term *fantasy*, possibly because of Holt's (1961) cogent demonstration that TAT stories lack the characteristics of fantasy as represented by reveries or daydreams.

Most, if not all, of the coding systems included in this volume work with "manifest," rather than "latent," symbolic, or disguised content. (The interpretation of symbols may be necessary when more conflictual motives, such as sex, are being assessed; cf. Clark, 1952.) For the most part, an attempt has been made to limit inferences that go much beyond the words used in order to attain high intercoder reliability. However, the conceptual/integrative complexity system (chapter 28) "requires the judgment of trained coders, who may have to make subtle inferences about the intended meaning of authors."

Derivation of scoring categories

In most uses of content analysis, coding categories are either identified in advance of obtaining verbal material on the basis of theoretical or practical considerations, or they are derived by classifying responses after they are produced by finding the descriptive categories into which most responses fit. In contrast, most systems in this book have identified coding categories either by determining the effects on imagery of *theoretically relevant experimental manipulations*, or by comparing the responses of theoretically relevant naturally occurring groups that differ in the strength of a characteristic. In their early work on hunger, Atkinson and McClelland (1948) showed that the content of imaginative stories varied systematically with hours since last eating. They discovered, however, *that the kinds of imagery changes that occurred with increasing hunger were not necessarily the changes they would have expected.* Thus, in subsequently deriving scoring systems for achievement and other "psychogenic" needs, they let the effects of their experimental manipulations determine the scoring categories. *Whatever*

kinds of imagery changed as a result of the manipulations defined the effect of the motive on thematic apperception and constituted the scoring categories.

The derivation of categories for the motive-to-avoid-success scoring system represents an interesting variation of this procedure. Fleming and Horner (chapter 11) conceive of fear of success as an avoidance motive subject to conscious denial. Their results suggest that the arousal of such an inhibitory tendency may produce a *decrease* rather than an increase in diagnostic imagery categories. They also find less fear of success imagery in response to strong, as compared with weak, achievement cues.

The sensitivity of a content analytic measure to theoretically relevant manipulations represents one kind of validation of the measure. A second kind of validity (construct validity) involves the demonstration that thematic scores are related as expected to a network of theoretically relevant dependent variables.

A few of the scoring systems included here have been derived by what might be called progressive refinement of theoretically derived categories. In those systems, (e.g., conceptual/integrative complexity), the empirical results of predictions from such categories have led to revisions of both the initial theory and the scoring categories derived from the theory.

Is thematic content analysis worth the effort?

Because content analysis is a labor-intensive method, why not use a more simple and direct way of obtaining the desired information? Because associative thought tends to be more spontaneous and less self-critical than self-report, thematic apperception or other thought samples may reveal thoughts and feelings about which the subject is unwilling or unable to report, though few today would go so far as to say that thematic apperception provides "an X-Ray picture of [the] inner self" (Murray, 1943, p. 1). In addition, content analysis of preexisting verbal material permits nonreactive assessment of persons who are not available for testing (e.g., the famous or the deceased). For additional discussions of the advantages and limitations of content analytic methods, the reader is referred to chapters 3, 6, 7, 11, 21, 23, and 25. Persuasive testimony to the value of the method is provided by the remarkably rich mine of findings reported in this volume, some of which are mentioned in the sections that follow.

HIGHLIGHTS: PART I

Part I deals with general issues in thematic research beginning with Atkinson's presentation of a theory of motivation that supplies a *conceptual foundation* for the thematic apperceptive measurement of motivation. The theory provides an explanation for issues concerning internal consistency, test length, the effect of one story on the next, the measurement of tem-

porary states versus relatively stable dispositions, and the effect on imaginative thought of a hierarchy of motives. Atkinson's conception is responsive to some of the concerns expressed early on by Feshbach (1961), Lazarus (1961), and others regarding the effect on thematic apperception of conflict, inhibition, and displacement.

Further understanding of the properties of thematic measures is provided by McClelland, Koestner, and Weinberger (chapter 3), who compare self-report measures of motives ("self-attributed motives") such as those obtained from the Personality Research Form (PRF; D. N. Jackson, 1974) with motives measured from imaginative thought ("implicit motives"). The former "predict immediate responses to structured situations," whereas the latter predict "spontaneous behavioral trends over time because of the pleasure derived from the activity itself." The authors conclude that "there is evidence that implicit and self-attributed motives are acquired in different ways at different times of life, respond generally to different types of incentives, function differently in guiding behavior, and are associated with different physiological correlates."

Emmons and King (chapter 4) broaden the discussion even more in an integrative review of the relation of thematic analysis to other current approaches to research in personality and social psychology. With respect to method, they consider the relation of information obtained from imaginative productions to that obtained by other approaches to the contents of consciousness, including personal memories, personal goals, naturally occurring thoughts (e.g., experience sampling methodology), and, more generally, "the private personality" (cf. Singer & Kolligian, 1987). They demonstrate that information obtained by other methods can be used to validate thematic measures as well as complement information obtained by thematic methods. With respect to theory, they relate the approaches to motivation, pattern, and coherence included in this volume to the approaches taken by theorists who deal with related concepts, including "nuclear scripts" (Tomkins, 1987), "core conditional patterns" (Thorne, 1989), "core conflictual relationships" (Luborsky, 1977), and "core organizing principles" (Meichenbaum & Gilmore, 1984). Emmons and King also compare approaches to personal goals, including "current concerns" (Klinger, 1978), "personal projects" (Little, 1983), "life tasks" (Cantor & Langston, 1989), and "personal strivings" (Emmons, 1989) and propose a way of thinking about the relation of personal goals to motives.

In chapter 5, McClelland demonstrates the desirability of considering *motive combinations* for the prediction of such varied phenomena as choice of work partners, risk taking, persistence, personal and marital adjustment, success in business careers, and health (including high blood pressure, the release of catecholamines, impaired immune functions, and severity of illness). Four moderator variables are shown to play an important role when used in conjunction with motive measures. *Uncertainty orientation*, described

in chapter 29 by Sorrentino, Roney, and Hanna, contributes to the understanding of the relation of achievement motivation to performance. *Stances toward the environment* – see chapter 31 by Stewart & Healy – help to explain, among other things, the relation of power motivation to control of anger, heavy drinking, and organizational membership. *Activity inhibition* helps to explain whether the power motive will be expressed for selfish purposes or for the good of others, and *responsibility* – see chapter 35 by Winter – improves the prediction of long-term success in business management as well as other behavioral manifestations of the power motive.

Veroff (chapter 6) reviews studies in which thematic apperceptive methods for measuring achievement, affiliation, power, and intimacy motives have been used in survey research on a cross section of the American population. Survey topics include mental health, marriage, parenthood, work, and Catholic–Protestant motivation differences. Results from similar surveys done in 1957 and in 1976 are compared. Veroff discusses various problems that can arise, and recommends procedures and pictures (see appendix II) for the use of thematic apperceptive measures in survey research.

The further extension of the method "to analyze archival historical materials, personal and cultural documents, and everyday verbal material such as conversations, reported dreams, and even transcriptions of television programs" is described by Winter (chapter 7). By using preexisting or naturally occurring verbal material, an investigator can study persons or groups that cannot or will not be tested directly, that are too large to be tested (whole cultures), or in whom testing may arouse unwanted reactions. Problems in history, political science, and economics become amenable to study by this approach. For example, achievement motivation has been related to economic development (see chapter 9), and integrative complexity (chapters 27 and 28) has been related to professional eminence, political leadership and ideology, and conflict and war. Explanatory style (see chapters 25 and 26) has also been related to the functioning of political leaders as well as to accounts of events in newspapers and to therapy transcripts.

Compared with the early development of many thematic measures, there is an *increased complexity in current theory and research*. Regarding earlier research, reservations had been expressed from both clinical and personological perspectives about the thematic apperceptive measurement of single variables taken out of the context of the rich information provided in a set of stories about the story writer (Carlson, 1989; Henry, 1961). And D. E. Hunt (1980) called for a conception of the whole person "to remind us of the context within which the single variable part operates" (p. 448).

It is true that many of the approaches taken in this book are neither clinical nor personological, and that they do not attempt to make use of all the information contained in each story. Reflecting the influence of

experimental and differential psychology, research with these systems has tended to assess one or more nomothetic variables in groups of subjects. However, the approaches of McAdams (chapter 15), Winter (chapters 7, 21, and 35), and Suedfeld, Tetlock, and Streufert (chapter 27) have been used extensively for the study of particular individuals, and the research of Peterson (chapter 25) and his associates extends to clinically relevant studies of individuals. Winter's discussion of idiographic studies of individuals shows that thematic scoring systems may be used "to make inferences about . . . particular individuals, as part of a systematic psychobiography or personality portrait." Winter reviews studies of political leaders that have employed several of the motive measures included in this volume, as well as the conceptual/integrative complexity, and explanatory style coding systems.

Moreover, the present volume reveals a clear trend away from single-variable research. As McClelland (chapter 5) puts it: "To do justice to the complexity of personality we need to consider many aspects acting simultaneously. We investigate motives one at a time primarily to validate our measures and learn about them, not because we think they act in isolation. Furthermore, different tasks arouse different motives or motive combinations. So we need to know what cues in the situation elicit different motives." He points out that combinations of motives reveal properties of persons that are not predictable from motives considered separately.

Atkinson (chapter 2) takes into account a *hierarchy of motives* in the individual as they interact with situations over time. He considers both approach and inhibitory tendencies, and employs computer simulation to accommodate the complexity of a model in which many aspects of the person and the situation are considered simultaneously over time.

McClelland, Koestner, and Weinberger (chapter 3) show that the inclusion of self-report measures of motives (self-attributed motives) *together with* thematic measures can improve the prediction of some types of behavior. For example, "the *n* Achievement variable by itself gives a poor indication of the area of life in which a person will strive to do better or be entrepreneurial. Self-attributed motives, plans, and goals are needed to show the direction in which the achievement motive will turn." Similarly, Emmons and King (chapter 4) recommend the use of a variety of methods *in addition to* the storytelling method for studying personal goals and "the private personality." Veroff (chapter 6) illustrates the value of multiple-variable analyses in survey research, and Winter (chapter 7) recommends multiple-variable assessment in the study of texts.

Veroff also calls attention to the important role of the social context in prediction and understanding. He employs context as a moderator in his analysis, and he uses pictures depicting relatively universal social situations in order not to neglect the context in which members of a particular gender, social, or age group express a given motive.

HIGHLIGHTS: PART II

The general issues discussed in part I are followed in part II by coding systems that fall into three classifications: motives, attribution and cognitive orientations, and psychosocial orientations.

Motive scoring systems

The motive scoring systems fall into three clusters relating to achievement, affiliation, and power.

ACHIEVEMENT-RELATED SYSTEMS. Theory and research regarding achievement-related motives are presented in chapters on the achievement motive, the motive to avoid success, and uncertainty orientation. In chapter 9, McClelland and Koestner describe the original development of the achievement motive scoring system and report cross-cultural replications and studies showing that the same scoring categories are applicable for females as well as for males. Recent research developments include studies of contingent paths to future goals, careers and occupations, self-concept, health, and collective levels of achievement motivation. Theory and research on the achievement motive are also discussed in chapters 2, 3, 6, and 7, and reliability issues are discussed in chapter 8.

Achievement situations may arouse not only the motive to approach success but *avoidance* motives as well. Atkinson (chapter 2) conceives of motivation to avoid failure as an inhibitory tendency that weakens, at least temporarily, the expression of the achievement tendency. Another such avoidance tendency is motivation to avoid success. Fleming and Horner (chapter 11) believe this type of motivation may be particularly likely to be aroused in women in competitive situations and should be taken into consideration in order to make sense of the behavior of women in such situations. Horner and Fleming (chapter 12) present a new version of the fear-of-success scoring system that was developed, in part, as a response to questions raised about the original system (Horner, 1968).

Also relevant to the understanding of achievement behavior is *uncertainty orientation* (chapter 29), which acts as a moderator variable influencing the relation of achievement motivation to risk taking and performance. The influence on achievement behavior of such situationally aroused factors as fear of failure, fear of success, and uncertainty orientation helps to make sense of some of the apparently conflicting findings in the literature on achievement motivation.

Yet another perspective on achievement tendencies is provided by the theory of *personal causation*. In chapter 23, deCharms describes another type of motivation that affects achievement behavior, as well as situational factors that enhance or diminish sought-after origin experiences.

AFFILIATION-RELATED SYSTEMS. Three systems concern affiliative tendencies: affiliation, intimacy, and affiliative trust–mistrust. The *n* Affiliation scoring system (chapters 13 and 14) was developed to measure a motive to establish, maintain, or restore positive affective relations with another person or persons. A great deal of research supports the construct validity of the measure, especially if it is interpreted to reflect not so much a tendency to approach affiliation as a tendency to avoid rejection.

To get at the positive, approach aspects of affiliative motivation, McAdams (chapters 15 and 16) developed a measure of intimacy motivation. Intimacy refers to a "recurrent preference or readiness for experiences of warm, close, and communicative interaction with other persons." Although this is a relatively recent system, a large body of research supports its construct validity. For example, intimacy scores are related to psychosocial adjustment, affiliative thoughts, feelings and behavior, and self-disclosure.

Reflecting Erikson's ideas about the development of *basic trust* during the oral period, the affiliative trust–mistrust system (chapters 17 and 18) assesses the strength of two kinds of feelings or sentiments about affiliative relationships: *trust* refers to seeing relationships as positive and enjoyable, *mistrust* to regarding relationships with negativity and cynicism. The system was developed to measure affiliative thoughts and feelings associated with the functioning of the immune system. Two independent subscales for trust and mistrust were derived. Construct validity studies show separate and combined subscale scores to be associated with such things as affiliative life changes, immune function, self-reported health, and parental feeding practices in the oral stage.

POWER-RELATED SYSTEMS. In developing the original *n* Power scoring system, Veroff (chapter 19) conceived of the power motive as a concern with having the means to influence others. Types of imagery characteristic of power motivation in males were identified and later cross-validated with females. Scores for *n* Power were found to be related to assertive behavior under certain conditions, and in national surveys Veroff found power to be related to marital problems, parent–adolescent relationships, and concern over sexual identity. He interpreted the pattern of results as indicating that the scores reflected *fear of weakness* more than a positive desire for power.

A subsequent measure of the power motive was developed by Winter (chapter 21) to assess a *positive* concern with having an impact on other people. Winter tells how the revised measure was derived and why thematic apperception is a particularly appropriate way of assessing this motive. The measure is applicable for males and females and for a wide range of ages, ethnic groups, and cultures. Power is considered a relatively stable disposition whose expression depends on other personality and situational factors (including social structure and culture). Possible origins of power